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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the history of deconstruction and discusses the use of the theories it involves within the author's work in family therapy situations. Jacques Derrida's term, deconstruction, has achieved widespread use among psychotherapists. This derives largely from the influence of Michael White, who has interpreted it in a Foucauldian way consistent with his practice of externalization. Problems are seen as oppressors to be excluded. A return to a Derridean understanding, in which narratives embraced by families to the exclusion of others return as symptoms that eventually hijack the prevailing family story, is proposed. Therapy gives excluded stories a voice by encouraging the acknowledgment of a universal abjection so that the "marginalized other" in all its forms may be included. Among the case studies presented is the story of a 14-year-old male who was reluctant to attend school. Through a meeting with his family, the author realized that the boy's mother was his only encouraging family member. The author then met with the boy and his mother. By explaining his story of hurt and loss at being forced to move in with his brother to make room for his mother's boyfriend, the boy was able to acknowledge his abjection and move through his problems. (Contains 46 references.) (MKA)

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DECONSTRUCTION AND THERAPY REVISITED: INCLUDING THE EXCLUDED

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Deconstruction and Therapy Revisited

Abstract

Jacques Derrida's term deconstruction has achieved widespread usage amongst psychotherapists. Much of this derives from the influence of Michael White who has interpreted it in a Foucauldian way consistent with his practice of externalization. Problems are seen as oppressors to be excluded. A return to a Derridean understanding, buttressed by attention to the work of Foucault, Lacan and Kristeva, is proposed in which narratives embraced by families to the exclusion of others return as symptoms which eventually hijack the prevailing family story. Therapy consists in giving excluded stories a voice through encouraging the acknowledgement of the abjection all share so that the"marginalized other" in all its forms may be included once again.

DECONSTRUCTION AND THERAPY REVISITED:

INCLUDING THE EXCLUDED

by

Thomas Alan Parry, Ph.D.

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said

in rather a scornful tone,

It means just what I choose it to mean--neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can

make words mean different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty,

"which is to be master--that's all."

Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*

Man's desire is the desire of the Other.

Hegel, *Phenomenology of the Spirit*

Prologue

In 1982 Jacques Derrida wrote an important essay entitled Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy. His essay harked back to a famous essay by Immanuel Kant entitled Of a Newly Raised Superior Tone in Philosophy (1796). Kant's essay had a satiric edge to it while Derrida's was a call to the other to "Come!" In that the very word evokes the closing words of the Apocalypse of John of Patmos, "Come, Lord Jesus!" Derrida dares us to be open to a revelation. It is a strange sort of revelation, however, one that reveals nothing because it is a call to welcome everything that is nothing because it is excluded. This constitutes a revelation,

certainly in the Biblical sense, where it is made very clear that it is, above all, by acts of justice, of including the excluded, that we are measured. "For YHWH, your God . . . executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and befriends the stranger, feeding and clothing him. So you too must befriend the stranger, for you were once strangers yourselves in the land of Egypt" (Deut. 10: 17-19). Hospitality toward the excluded is an act of justice in every domain of life.

The theme of the excluded other haunts the postmodern world as the alienated self obsessed the modern. This is as it should be for the postmodern world begins with the Holocaust, A certain kind of world came to an end, one in which such a thing could happen for the very reason that no one but its executioners could imagine it to be possible, not even its victims. We now live in a world that not only knows such a thing is possible, but that it did happen--and, in different forms, continues to happen. We have lost whatever remained of pride in our virtue, so we press on in the knowledge that there is no horror that can conceivably be done by human beings to each other that lies beyond our capacity and, even more frighteningly, our will. No matter how much we may continue to deceive ourselves about ourselves, the Holocaust accuses us. It is branded indelibly upon our memories. Because it was done, and willed to be done, we surely cannot rest until we understand the kind of thinking and the deficiency of feeling that can take place in human beings that allowed it to happen.

That is the supreme challenge of the time in which we now live: the time after the modern world ended, the postmodern. It is also why the term itself, as slippery and overused as it is, remains useful. It does set us off from everything that went before, even what we once proudly called modern, a word, after all, that simply means "now." We are called to live beyond the now, in the sense that we are the people who live in the realization that there are no limits of any kind to the possibilities for human violence so, to the extent to which we are willing to remain fully conscious, it can never again be business as usual until we have contained that

will to violence and the dehumanization of the other which justifies it.

Deconstruction Revisited

The term deconstruction has become part of the language of psychotherapy and work with families. It has particularly been influential in the latter as part of its ongoing effort to establish itself upon a philosophical base which would enable it to understand families as more than the sum of their parts and to work with them in that vein. As such the emerging discipline also sought to do justice to the complexity of families understood as comprising constellations of interacting individuals. Accordingly family work could not easily be reductionistic. Moreover it strove, from its inception, to include the excuded. Initially it simply included the family of which individual patients were members and by whom they surely had been influenced in developing the problems that had brought them to therapy in the first place. From that point on family work may be said to have distinguished itself by its inexorable determination to include whatever was conventionally excluded, initially the family, currently the family's strengths. In its respect for the complexity of the subject matter family work also sought to include philosophical concepts and reached, as well, into biology and anthropology, and not only psychology and psychiatry, for analogies of family functioning.

To these ends family therapy at its outset in the 1950s and 1960s adopted a general systems model which, although derived from biology more than philosophy, nonetheless through the work of such seminal figures as von Bertalanffy (1968), von Foerster (1962) and Jantsch (1980), explored the epistemological implications of regarding the world from a systems perspective. The eclectic explorations of the maverick anthropologist Gregory Bateson (1972) brought the language of epistemology to the center of the burgeoning discussion concerning how we see and suppose that we know the world from what he identified as less of a biological and more of cybernetic or systemic framework. From the individual

perspective we simply look inside the person in search of clues to the sources of his or her motives. From the systemic perspective, however, we look at the ways in which each actor does what she does in response to what the other has done in reciprocating circles. The matter is further complexified when a third party is involved in the interaction and may be invited to respond to her observations and reflections on how the other two are interacting.

The more the complexities of interaction were examined and worked with in families the more complex the theoretical and methodological of necessity was required to become to do justice to the task at hand. The first to apply the brilliantly suggestive work of Bateson and his co-workers as a systematized approach were Watzlawick, Beavins and Jackson (1967) working out of the Mental Research Institute in Palo Alto. They developed a brief model of interactional therapy that was also influenced by the work of the great hypnotherapist, Milton Erickson, based on disarming people's defenses by using the habitual patterns of interactional behavior against the problem to break the impasse that had brought the family or couple to therapy in the first place.

A group of disenchanted psychoanalysts from Milan, Italy led by a dynamic woman named Mara Selvini Palazzoli (Selvini Palazzoli, Boscolo, Cecchin, Prata, 1978) than developed a rigorous interviewing method based completely on Bateson's cybernetic ideas. Their work was also paradoxical, or counterparadoxical as they preferred, in its application, but not itself. They viewed the family as working against its own interests. Their interviewing methods consisted in formulating a seeming paradox that was intended to be counter to and corrective of the double bind in which the family was trapped. They believed, furthermore, that, at the systemic level, a particular pattern of behavior makes very clear sense in that it is maintaining the integrity of the family as a whole. It only seems paradoxical from an individual perspective.

An approach that was more straightforward, lineal in the language of

Bateson, which sought simply to change the child's problematic behavior, ran the risk of worsening the family's overall systemic health The Milan team would "positively connote" the behavior, not simply of the symptomatic child, but of every member of the family system as taking place in the interests of the well-being of each other and of the whole family. The behavior of the child would be singled out in such a way as to praise his dedication to the family rather than to negatively connote his behavior as pathological or otherwise problematic.

Family therapists found this kind of thinking to be extremely congenial, but the very manner in which it succeeded in doing justice to the complexities of interaction patterns within families led to the critique which demanded even greater complexity. The Milan approach to Bateson was challenged in terms of the larger cultural implications contained within its use of an essentially biological analogy to describe the operations of the human family. It is an institution that is biological to be sure, yet inescapably cultural as well. The family is constantly subject to influence by the roles ascribed to family members by the culture at large. Feminists within the field of family therapy led the attack against the Milan approach, centering their criticisms on its pivotal concept of neutrality. The latter was part of an attempt by the Milan therapists to avoid taking any position that implied blame or the taking of sides between conflicted family members. To do so was considered likely to perpetuate rather than heal the conflicts in question. As such cultural factors were considered actually to be part and parcel of maintaining the age-old dualistic linearity of good/bad, right/wrong that was probably at the very core of the problem in the first place. Taking sides, for instance, on a clear-cut issue like physical or even sexual abuse would be considered in a very real sense, counter-therapeutic. If law or custom was being violated, the Milan therapists insisted, the problem was no longer a matter for therapy, but for legal intervention best handled by the police or by child protection services in the community.

Such arguments made not a dent on a new wave of therapists and theorists

who began to emerge in the mid-eighties, mostly of a feminist (James & McIntyre, 1983; Goldner, 1985;1988) Hare-Mustin, 1987), or explicitly profeminist (White, 1986; White & Epston, 1989) persuasion. Goldner (1988) especially argued that families are made up of males and females and that the mother is indispensable to the very existence of the family. This notwithstanding, the family has historically, been the place where the oppression of women has begun and where it is maintained. To attempt to gloss over this in the name of systemic neutrality is only to perpetuate this outrage through willful ignorance. In attempting to include all equally in the family and to blame no one the Milan systemic approach was excluding the conditions necessary to the well-being of the most pivotal member of the family. Her unique predicament had to be included.

The Problem as Oppressor

The emergence of the feminist critique, coupled with Michael White's overtly profeminist stance as part of a dramatic new slant on therapy with families, signalled the placing of cultural criticism at the forefront of the discipline. Where the Milan systemic approach had sought to include all members of the family equally, in particular the otherwise marginalized identified patient, Michael White and his friend and colleague from New Zealand, the expatriate Canadian, David Epston (White & Epston, 1989), sought to include as part of the purview of family therapy not only the slighting of women in families, but of the oppressive role culture was seen to play in giving rise to various symptomatic constraints. Just as the Milan therapists had reached outside the field itself and had rooted their methodology firmly upon the audacious thinking of the philosophically-minded anthropologist, Gregory Bateson, so White also reached out, invoking the ideas of the French poststructuralist social critic, Michel Foucault (1965; 1973; 1977; 1978; 1984) to provide the framework for his theoretical and methodological orientation.

White has generally been identified as the primary spokesperson for the so-

called narrative approach to therapy and, although his work seems to be including more and more purely narrative elements such as the importance of "thickening the plot" in the authoring of a more nuanced, complex story his approach, in my opinion, has been more political than narrative from its inception. Even White's clinically ingenious concept and practice of externalization is best understood within his overall position that problems are not part of a family's malfunction, not the expression of a fault within either a member or any of the relationships in the family. Instead they are like foreign invaders which oppress the family. This is because they are indicative of cultural inequities, chief among which is the marginalization of women, which can only have adverse effects for families. These are internalized by family members who assume that the problems they are experiencing reflect deficiencies within the family and one or more of its members, with the mother typically blaming herself, wondering where she went wrong.

This is where Foucault becomes important for White. For the former the society of the modern West has discovered and virtually perfected a means of social control that does not rely on terror or threats of dire consequences for transgressing its laws and norms. Rather it has, through its idealization of individualism, been able to encourage its citizens to keep an eye on themselves. This has meant that individuals internalize the demands of a social order such that, when they do fail or fall short, people blame themselves or each other. They blame themselves and each other in ways that keeps them trying to do better. Chief among the measures by which people internally endeavor to regulate themselves and each other is the ideology of mental health which keeps people, especially in the highly productive middle class, evaluating their own and each other's behavior, particularly within family's and schools in terms of what the mental health ideology defines as normal.

The normal encompasses essentially compliant and economically productive, essentially law-abiding behavior, in short the behavior that keeps a society operating in an efficient, economically viable and reasonably safe way. Is there anything wrong

with this? It surely beats brutality, terror and intimidation as ways to keep people in line. It does so, however, by encouraging people to blame themselves or someone else as personally responsible when they find themselves or those close to them acting in unruly or resistant ways, that is to say outside the "the normal." After all, says Foucault, "it was no longer the offence, the attack on the common interest, it was the departure from the norm, the anomaly; it was this that haunted the school, the court, the asylum or the prison" (Foucault, 1977 p. 299). Following Foucault, White views the family as victimized or even seduced by the constraints of normalization and of whatever symptom that happens to be exhibited as the mark of a justifiable resistance against this stultifying force that is controlling them. White wants to encourage the family to unite against the recognition that the factor upsetting them resides, not within but outside the family. This is the clue to his famous concept of externalization for which he is most renowned.

By engaging in externalizing conversations about the problems that bring people to therapy in the first place White (1991) makes it clear that he is attempting to objectify problems as something 'out there' imposing itself upon the relationships inside. "This objectification", he points out, "engages persons in externalizing conversations in relation to that which they find problematic rather than internalizing conversations" (1991, p. 29) Problems are generally *experienced* as residing inside the persons whose behavior manifests them. As such, the problems become indistinguishable from the persons. They have become part of their identity. By externalizing the problem and putting it out there it becomes possible to talk *about* it. It is no longer persons that are being described, it is a problem that is oppressing them. By externalizing the conversation about the problem a statement is being made that is both personal and political. White concludes:

> As persons become engaged in these externalizing conversations, their private stories cease to speak to them of their identity and of the truth of their relationships--these private stories are no longer transfixing of persons'

> lives. Persons experience a separation from , and an alienation in relation to these stories. In the space established by this separation, persons are free to explore alternative and preferred knowledges of who they might be: alternative and preferred knowledges into which they might enter their lives (1991, p. 29).

Just as the Milan team developed their approach from the works of Gregory Bateson, so White, though very critical of the Milan team's central concept of neutrality, built his approach from another Batesonian proposal. People act as they do, Bateson had argued, because they are prevented from acting otherwise. White drew from this assertion the conviction that the problems that beset people lie neither in the stars *nor* in themselves, but that they have become underlings, underlings of the problems that oppress them. These problems do so as the outcome of power inequities inherent in modern Western society which, literally as it were, come home to roost within family relationships. As the primary socializing institution in human society, the family is the dominant source of the internalizing process whereby individuals are turned into what Foucault refers to as 'docile bodies,' the willing products of sophisticated and seemingly humane technologies of power/knowledge designed to keep people in line.

For addressing this aspect of Foucault's critical analysis of modern Western society White's use of externalization has been an ingenious way of addressing the problemitizations the former pursues. White, in other words, externalizes what the various technologies of power/knowledge have encouraged to be internalized namely people's own culpability for problems that beset them. By separating person from problem White seeks to subvert the pervasiveness of the power/knowledge technologies in their ways of working by making it clear that the prevailing knowledges which lead people to make the assumption of the unity of person and problem do not necessarily hold. A further, but related, advantage of the method of

externalization is that it subverts the "truth" power of those knowledges that would unify the person and the problem. He also offers individuals and families a specific technique for resisting the operations of the knowledge/power technologies in encouraging their docility.

An often neglected aspect of the method of externalization, and a key to what allows White's approach to remain systemic involves a thorough quizzing of all family members to determine the ways the problem influences them as well as the ways they are invited into participation with the problem, inadvertently and unintentionally of course. Thus a family which is heavily under the influence of one of the children's temper may be canvassed concerning various possible ways each unwittingly accepts the invitations by "Temper" to make it stronger and more frequent in the child in question such as by teasing, or by mimicking, baiting, lecturing or criticizing. Once the other family members are made aware of the ways they influence and are influenced by the problem their resources can be joined with that of the identified patient to overcome the grip it has on the whole family and not only the most obvious victim.

By the late 'eighties White had embraced what he described as a fully narrative approach (White & Epston, 1989). A single behavioral problem as no longer the subject of externalization but people's stories about their lives. The story to be externalized was termed the 'dominant' or 'totalizing' story which had come to define them as a person not only in the eyes, of others, but, by typical processes of internalization, in their own eyes. Such a dominant story is, characteristically, the account and descriptions of a person that is brought to therapy and presented as problematic. Moreover, and most importantly, this story is initially not described as a story, but as identical with the person himself. At this point, in short, the person is the problem. As such he is supposed to be "fixed," changed, or cured.

The therapeutic task, if not the therapeutic expectation, is, through the process of externalizing conversations, to separate the problem-saturated

descriptions or narratives of the person from the person himself. This also appears to be what White means by deconstruction. As I have already indicated, he makes it clear from the beginning of his article in question that he is making no particular attempt to use the term deconstruction in any strict Derridean fashion. By his admittedly "rather loose definition, deconstruction has to do with procedures that subvert taken-for-granted realities and practices; those so-called 'truths' that are split off from the conditions and the context of their production, those disembodied ways of speaking that hide their biases and prejudices, and those familiar practices of self and of relationship that are subjugating of persons' lives" (White, 1991, p. 27). He goes on to say that such a process can have the effect of rendering strange or exoticizing otherwise embedded or taken-for-granted realities by objectifying them, so to speak, putting them out there, separate from the person and talking about particular descriptions as a narrative that has become attached to the person, as it were. "This objectification engages persons in externalizing conversations in relation to that which they find problematic, rather than internalizing conversations" (p. 29). An externalizing conversation is one in which, not just a particular symptom, or problem is externalized, but a totalistic description of the person is objectified as opposed to remaining an examination of what is supposedly wrong with the person.

The story that is made the subject of the externalizing conversations which follow is, once objectified, better able to shed light on a further amalgam of familial and cultural attributions, expectations and totalizing descriptions in the form of repeated narratives which have served to define the person and constrain his behavior to the parameters circumscribed by these stories. This process is carried out by conversations which encourage "persons to provide an account of the effects of the problem in their lives" (p. 29). This is done in a very thorough and detailed way, emphasizing in particular how these stories have effected the persons' views of

themselves and their relationships, culminating in "investigations of how persons have been recruited into these views" (p. 29). Through such conversations White maintains that people's private stories are felt less as descriptions of their identity and of the "true" state of their relationships and more as alien impositions upon their actual experiences. By this means they are increasingly able to understand stories as matters of personal choice so that they become "free to explore alternative and preferred knowledges of who they might be" (p. 29).

The choosing of "alternate knowledges" is made possible by encouraging persons to recall experiences of theirs that contradict those stories with their invariably constraining effects. Such experiences are referred to by White as unique outcomes and become the basis not only for questioning the validity of the dominant stories that have hitherto defined them, but for amplifying these outcomes to provide a whole new story about themselves and their lives which is liberating rather than constraining. A very detailed process then follows in which persons are encouraged to evaluate and choose those unique outcomes upon which they wish to base a "re-authoring" of their lives. Throughout this process the key category upon which a new, chosen story is built and upon which the old, dominant story is externalized to be overthrown is that of personal experience. Dominant or totalizing stories tend not to be congruent with personal experiences of the events which they purportedly describe. Thus a person who was invariably told she was wrong so that she has come to doubt whether she should ever dare assume she can be right about anything may be asked what she experienced in her remembrance of various of those defining events. Once she remembers some of the ways she was told she was wrong, ways that were demeaning, bullying and disqualifying, she may come increasingly to realize that she was indeed bullied or shamed into believing she was wrong in order that someone else could always be right. Or she may remember as unique outcomes an entire variety of experiences in which she was often correct. At any rate the distinguishing feature lies in the ongoing comparison

between her personal experience and the attributions and definitions particular to the dominant story. The latter are invariable discrepant while the new story will be established upon the firm ground of its congruency with personal experience.

In her rejoinder to Madigan (1992) Deborah Luepnitz dryly observed in her very title that White and Foucault had "Nothing in common but their first names." The recasting of that controversy is of no concern to this presentation except insofar as White's use of the term deconstruction as well as his well-known championing of Foucault raises certain questions. One of these concerns whether, at particular points highly germane to the practice of therapy in a postmodern world, he has made the best therapeutic use of the challenge that the major poststructuralists, Foucault, Derrida and Lacan pose, not only to contemporary Western culture, but to the very role psychotherapy plays within that culture. Indeed, it may be all the more pertinent to include the major poststructuralist thinkers together, for White has most recently (1998) firmly identified himself with a poststructuralist position at the same time as he made less mention of Foucault.

In his seminal article (White, 1991) Foucault's discourses on the way the technologies of power/knowledge operate to define people both for themselves is drawn upon to support what White calls a deconstructive method of separating persons from the constraining stories that bring them to therapy. This begs the question of whether White's use of Foucault constitutes an essentially accurate representation of the latter's work. Supporters of White (Madigan, 1992; Redekopp, 1995) argue persuasively that his work does indeed represent a therapeutic expression of Foucauldian thought. Others are not so sure (Luepnitz, 1992; Fish, 1993). Be that as it may, I suggest that that a narrative perspective would gain in therapeutic power by drawing on a still broader poststructuralist understanding of deconstruction over the more eclectic way that White employs the term.

Saussure, Structuralism and Beyond

Poststructuralism, grew out of the structuralist extensions of the work of the

French structural linguist Ferdinand de Saussure who proposed that a science of language could be built based upon a distinction which he made between two aspects of each word: as signifier and as signified. The signifier refers to the word as sound, the word tree, for instance, bears no relation to trees. The word as signified, in turn, refers to the word as concept. They both stand for the concrete phenomenon of the tree, but are all strictly arbitrary representations. Our knowing through language, therefore, does not participate in the things themselves. The world of language is a world all its own. It can exist without reference to the objects in the world they represent. Nonetheless, our understandings of the world occur only through language for the structure of language is one with the structure of human thought. There is no place in structured thought where we can go to leave language behind. We are always in language when we think in any structured way so that the world is understood and its phenomena separated out from it as different objects by virtue of language. Distinct differences are not inherent in the world of phenomena. They only exist as clearly different objects because we name them so.

The significance of Saussure's ideas for the structuralism and poststructuralism that followed have less to do with how language relates to the world than with how the elements of language relate to each other. The words we use as signs are completely arbitrary. Yet out of this arbitrariness comes meaning for it is only out of difference that meaning is possible. Saussure's structural linguistics influenced a generation of French social scientists, literary critics, and psychoanalysts, Levi-Strauss, Barthes, Kristeva, Lacan, Foucault and Derrida. The latter, who form a kind of poststructuralist trinity, did not stay long as structuralists for each in their own distinctive but related way took elements of Saussure's thought with them and went beyond it into what we now know as poststructuralism. They each built on the extent to which we are prisoners of language in that there is no position outside language by which we may understand

language. If we want to know that meaning of a word, for instance, we look it up in the dictionary and find a set of words telling us what the word in question means. We can never escape that dictionary.

Derrida, Differance and Deconstruction

Derrida took issue with the rigor with which Saussure's distinguishes between the signifier and the signified. He wondered whether the signified as concept really had very much work left to do since the signifier or sound of the word implicitly contained the concept within the sound. This distinction has had the effect historically, Derrida suggested, of encouraging a quest for "a concept *signified in and of itself,* a concept simply present for thought, independent of a relationship to . . . a system of signifiers" (Derrida, 1981, p. 19), a **transcendental signified**. It would require no signifier for it would stand outside the endless chain of signifiers constantly being used with reference to one another. As long as primary attention is paid to the concept there is bound to be a quest for an ultimate concept. Western metaphysics is dominated by that quest, whether it be called a center, a foundation, an essence, Truth, ultimate reality, the Unmoved Mover, or God. Because this transcendental signified is thought of as present for thought, though not requiring a signifier since it 'just is,' Derrida refers to its pursuit as a **"metaphysics of presence"** and suggested that it haunted all Western thought. Furthermore this search has the effect of creating a fault line that runs through all Western thought, giving it all a metaphysical dimension by implication, whenever matters of importance are discussed. This has the effect of setting up a pronounced tendency to conceptualize in terms of binary oppositions. The more valued or present aspect of the issue at hand of course is given precedence thereby suggesting that its counterpart is not as valued, lacks presence. There are many, indeed countless, such oppositions. Here are a few: transcendent/imminent, soul/body, life/death, thinking/feeling, essence/accident, order/chaos, nature/culture, male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, conscious/unconscious, being/nonbeing,

right/left, same/different, us/them, speech/writing, signifier/signified.

One side of the binary pair will be seen to imply a presence so that the other equally implies an absence of a specially valued or essential quality. Derrida sought to challenge this historic habit. He did it, first of all, by giving priority to the signifier in Saussure's division He suggested what should have been apparent for Saussure from the beginning, namely that the division between signified and signifier is itself arbitrary since the signified is just as much a signifier as any other. Once priority is taken away from this signifier everything becomes an endless play of signifiers with no center, origin or foundation to the ways we describe the world It is all a play of the differences each word signifies. No signifier has more presence than another.

The risk then became that the term difference would be given that importance. Derrida got around this by inventing a word that is neither a word or a concept, that is it is not a word or signifier in any language nor is it a concept since it refers to nothing at all. He invented the notorious word ***differance*** (Derrida, 1982). There is not only no such word, but it also plays with us by sounding the same in French as *difference. Differance* makes it possible to talk about the play of differences without making difference itself into a presence, a transcendental signified. Nor does *differance* refer to an absence for absence is also one of its effects.

Derrida's most famous concept remains **deconstruction.** This term, and the use to which it has been put, highlights the essentially arbitrary nature of the binary oppositions that have pervaded Western thought. If such oppositions do not, at first, seem entirely arbitrary it is likely because they reflect a certain longstanding urgency which arises out of a yearning for a transcendental signified, a center or a stabilizing meaning that then becomes intrinsic to the privileged term within the opposition. For the binary opposites, transcendence/immanence, the former has traditionally been privileged because it has come to imply the place where a higher truth is present while immanence has been marginalized as the place of a merely pragmatic truth. Likewise, of the pair male/female, the former has been

traditionally privileged on a number of what are now accepted as spuriously based arguments: priority in creation, made in the image of God, best equipped to rule, most intelligent, having a penis, each as questionable as the other. Accordingly, the female has in such terms customarily been designated in terms of a lack of the "more important" quality. The latter pairing highlights something else about this practice. The term that is marginalized does not simply go away, but continues its influence until it can no longer be overlooked. When that begins to happen the arbitrary nature of the original opposition is exposed.

The divisions are seen to be arbitrary once the central idea of a transcendental signified itself is challenged as simply one more signifier. Derrida and the project of deconstruction are often regarded as apolitical although Derrida himself has insisted that there is nothing more political in its implications than deconstruction and the slightest consideration of such binaries as white/colored, heterosexual/homosexual, normal/abnormal, nature/society immediately suggests determinants that are political through and through. Binary thinking is, in fact, inherently oppressive as Derrida himself points out: "In a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a *vis-vis* but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other . . .or has the upper hand" (Derrida, 1981, p. 41). One might go so far as to say that binary thinking is itself inherently political. It is about who or what has the power, the power in this case being who or what gets to pronounce which side of the binary split has presence. It is also who is included in the privileged portion.

The division is arbitrary, as well, in that where the line is placed is artificial. Whenever one side of the split is talked about the other is inescapably brought to mind and contains **traces** of its opposite. It even becomes the basis upon which its opposite is defined and understood. Male, for instance, can only be comprehended in relation to what is not male, hence female. "The signifier/signified opposition

lives only off the signifier it nonetheless attempts to erase . . .What one tries to keep outside inhabits the inside and there would be no inside without that fact. . We could say, for example, that the term excluded by the binary divide returns in some sense . . . to sign the act of its own exclusion . . .(Bennington & Derrida, 1992, p. 217).

Once we abandon the quest for or the expectation of a transcendental signified we can operate amidst what Derrida calls a freeplay of signifiers, a world of word play in which meanings are neither fixed nor are some more privileged than others. All there is to give meaning and understanding to words is the play of differences, of *differance.* Derrida calls us to use language freely and playfully, poetically and metaphorically. When all differences are embraced and allowed freeplay the excluded are once again included. All arbitrary divisions are overcome. Let us now look at one, for whom divisions are seen as both arbitrary and imprisoning

Foucault and the Prisons of Language

Michel Foucault bears a particularly close look due to the degree to which White has established much of his therapeutic position upon Foucauldian grounds (Cf., White & Epston, 1989, Ch. 1; White, 1991). The way in which White drew upon Foucault surely has an ironical quality about it since the latter had, in the first place, very little interest in the uses to which therapeutic derivations of psychology, particularly psychoanalysis (Miller, 1992), were put and, in the second place in fact, regarded psychiatrist, psychoanalysts, psychologists and social workers as confessors, so to speak, if not the "head police" of those singularly benign modern technologies of the self which encourage people to imprison themselves within the cage of normality. What, finally, would have drawn White as a singular champion of a kind of liberation therapy to the figure perhaps most vigorously associated with challenging the Enlightenment model of human perfectibility, the very basis for all such optimistic approaches to what is humanly possible?

"No other contemporary philosophical thinker," writes Bernhauer, "possessed Foucault's acute ability to discover and describe the confinements that

imprison human life and thought: The confinement of the mad in the Age of Reason; the condemnation of the asylum's patients to the status of children; the internment of thought in the human sciences; the incarceration of prisoners in the penitentiary; the imprisonment of human identity within the cell of a sexual self; the fate of living in a carceral archipelago" (1990, pp. 6-7). It is fitting, therefore, that the single work for which Foucault is best known is his work on prisons, *Discipline and punish* (1979) in English, but *Surveiller et punir* (1977) in the original. Interestingly, each title cover, the two aspects of Foucault's argument of the means by which the modern technologies of power and knowledge developed to "encourage" people to discipline themselves in response to their sense of being constantly under surveillance. Such methods dispensed with the need for traditional methods of coercive punishment to induce compliance. People under surveillance usually discipline themselves. The development of such technologies was a direct outgrowth of the emergence of separating out "man" as a subject of scientific investigation. A science of man made it possible to objectify human beings, the better to control them by encouraging them to direct and value themselves, and personally choose ends actually desired by forces other than themselves.

Foucault's work through much of the 1960s consisted of efforts to describe the rules that governed the limits of discourse which influenced what would or could be written about in describing a given historical period. What was written, and the rules delimiting that discourse, became the "history" of an era more than what had "actually" happened. This is because there were no "objects prior to discourse." Indeed, in a sense, that could not be known only the discourses about the period which formed a kind of intellectual prison which, like all such enclosures described by Foucault, the inmates, in this case historians, entered freely while even extolling its virtues. Foucault became a poststructuralist at the point at which he began to make it clear that the so-called rules delimiting discourse were, indeed, not so much

rules as prisons comprised of historically engendered signifiers which imposed essentially arbitrary differences and divisions toward subjects that were otherwise part and parcel of one anóther. The limits imposed by the terms of a particular discourse were not so much exercises in the liberation of humankind wrought by reason, as the Enlightenment boasted, as they were expressions of power. The power to set the terms of a given discourse, in other words, is the power to exclude. This is why the terms power and knowledge are so often written as power/knowledge in Foucauldese. The assumption that it was possible and eminently desirable to separate out "man" and study him as an object of knowledge produced only a certain kind of discourse which attempted to do the impossible, namely to separate the inseparable. Man could only be studied within his historical embeddedness.

Foucault first received prominence with the gauntlet he threw with the publication in 1961 of *Folie et deraison: L'histoire de la folie de l'age classique* which was extensively revised for its English translation in 1965 as *Madness and civilization: A history of insanity in the Age of Reason.* In it he put forth an unorthodox argument that the treatment of the mentally ill from the 17th century on had less to do with treating such people with kindness and humanity as reason dictated, and more to do with removing unproductive citizens from the streets, as well as dealing with a new way of understanding unreason in relation to reason. In public they would be a poor example to the more diligent and would be targets for the more zealous of these who might otherwise mistreat them and, yes, there was a strong humanitarian impulse at work.

The type of thinking, the ***episteme,*** to use a word much employed by Foucault subsequently as he developed his **archeology** of historical thought, that began increasingly to inform the way madness was understood from the Age of Reason on to its full flowering in the 18th century Enlightenment represented a major departure separating reason from reason. In the Middle Ages madness, like the constant presence of death, haunted the world and existed as a possibility that

could invade and take over anyone's life. "Although there were attempts to treat certain of its expressions," Bernhauer comments, " madness was generally left free to exist in the culture as a phenomenon that was irreducible to other forms of experience" (1990, p. 38). Shakespeare and Cervantes portrayed madness as a tragic possibility inherent in human nature when certain boundaries were transgressed.

Once madness was separated out from reasonable or even "normal" behavior it could be studied as a phenomenon complete unto itself, unreason studied by reason, discourse on madness. No longer was unreason so much something that we must all wrestle with and come to know as part of the mystery of life and death as conscious beings, but something that resided in a different class of people, *viz.*, the mad. This separation between reason and unreason and, most particularly between the reasonable or normal and the unreasonable or mad has stalked everyday life in the twentieth century and is still very much with us as we await the next.The binary division thus created is perhaps the primary basis upon which exclusion from the ranks of the included is made insofar as it pertains to the work therapists do. Madness became an illness, in keeping with the medicalization of errant and deviant behavior. This process was perfected as described in the second of Foucault's repunctuations of modern history, *Birth of the clinic: An archeology of medical perception*(1973). Once the medical gaze had looked upon and identified an anomaly as a disease it became an entity that was henceforth sealed off from the normal or the healthy, terms which became synonymous.

Power is Foucault's Master signifier, the empty signifier without a matching signified. Thus: "Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault, 1976/1980). It is best understood, I think, with reference to Nietzsche's will to power, the urge that life enacts as it asserts itself. The will to power is simply what life does. As such it is the exercise of what evolutionary psychologists call dominance. For Pinker (1997, pp. 494ff.) dominance boils down to the question of who can hurt whom. In the world of

nonhuman animals this question is resolved wither by disputing another animal's claim or deferring to it. In the highly symbolic world of humans one person's way of asserting dominance may be another's of giving deference. Indeed deference may become a form of dominance. When Foucault says power is everywhere and cannot be localized I think this is what he means. To suggest, with White, that power is the expression of privilege that marginalizes those who are oppressed as though power went in one direction from those who have it to those who do not is neither Foucauldian nor systemic. For Foucault as with Nietzsche, the weak and the oppressed express the will to power as much and often as effectively as the conventionally powerful. How power operates in the social order to encourage people to choose their own forms of imprisonment can only be understood fully when it sen that power is what people exercise to get what they want.

In the final phase of Foucault's unfortunately abbreviated life he shifted his attention from the technologies of power/knowledge to those of the self. The technologies of the self pertain to those ways, practiced and perfected during the historical periods from ancient Greece through Roman and Christian periods which involve the ways various people have performed operations on their own bodies and souls, their actions and their thinking in order to reach a desired level of either wisdom, perfection,happiness or pleasure. Foucault concluded that the last century's preoccupation with sexuality consisted only of the creation of a body of discourse that separated out the problematics associate with the pursuit of certain pleasures of bodies. By inviting the application of certain practices in the interests of enhancing pleasure the pleasures sought because, if anything, more elusive than ever to be replaced by a problematics of sexuality. Thus the "afflicted" could go to a sex therapist, an expert in sexual discourse, to discover, or rediscover, how to "make" their body give them pleasure. Is this but another technology for the production of docile bodies, bodies that are no longer terribly sure of themselves?

Foucault's final word, nonetheless. contains some hopefulness. It is twofold. One approach lies in making of oneself a work of art. In this he follows both Nietzsche and Baudelaire whose modern man Foucault describes approvingly as being one "who makes of his body, his behavior,his feelings and passions, his every existence, a work of art. Modern man, for Baudelaire, is not man who goes off to discover himself, his secrets and his hidden truth; he is the man who tries to invent himself" (1984, pp. 41-42). Firstly, Foucault admires unruliness or resistance:

> Where there is power there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. . These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent (1978, pp. 95-96).

We can only speculate, at this point, how Foucault would have described what has emerged since his death. He made much of modern Western society operating on the basis of people disciplining themselves to desire what the surprisingly smooth running of an economically productive society demands. They even disciplined themselves by submitting themselves to the gaze which exercised power by encouraging rather than by limiting desire. The socioeconomic world of today's postmodern society would seem to have gone even further in perfecting the technologies of power/knowledge to the point where, if anything, discipline upon the self in the interests of bringing about docile bodies is discouraged by implication. We can only wonder what he may have made of electronic technologies which encourage both docile *and* desiring bodies. Hence the gratification of desire and the hope that the possession of those goods that keep the economy growing will bring

happiness creates a carceral society that people enter to gratify desire only. Moreover it does so, as Moore suggests, by means of an eye that controls "not by being all-seeing, but by being seen by all" (1994, p. 112). Perhaps Jacques Lacan would have been better able to appreciate the ingenuity of an eye through which we are encouraged to gratify our desire for the good of all.

Lacan and What We Lack

Jacques Lacan (1977; 1981) takes us in a very different direction from either Derrida or Foucault. Lacan sought to revision Freud by suggesting that what the master said is even more powerful and more radical in shedding light on the human condition when it is understood in terms of the vissisitudes of language rather than of the instincts. The unconscious operates, Lacan insisted, like a language. Like Derrida who concluded that, once the quest for a transcendental signified is exposed and abandoned, there is only the the play of signifiers, Lacan proposed that, psychologically too, the action is with the signifier, how the word is expressed rather than with the signified, what the word refers to.

Lacan too sees a fault line which can neither be avoided nor surmounted running through human life. For him this fault line involves not knowing our own desire. The human infant is born premature hence helpless and dependent for survival upon the devoted love and sense of security provided by her parents. She must enter the world of language which has the power to name and circumscribe her. From that point on she will be expected to be according as she is described, first by others and soon thereafter by herself. Around the time she starts to become described by language and the cultural expectations that proceed therefrom, between about six to eighteen months of age, she enters what Lacan calls *le stat du miroir*, the **mirror stage**. She observes the coordinated movements and all-round "perfection" of the mother who, in a sense, mirrors her distress by a look of alarm, her pleasures with smiles and hugs. She thereby begins the process of providing for the child an image of wholeness which she comes to associate with herself who, of

course, is anything but coordinated, competent and"perfect." Here the first major fault line is established between where the child is and is seen and described by others, on one hand, and the expectation upon herself for a wholeness and perfection that can never be realized, on the other. Life henceforth will be lived in terms of a discrepancy that can never be bridged save by fooling oneself. An ideal will always be sought, but never achieved. This discrepancy also establishes a sense of life as desire, of wanting something that is forever beyond oneself.

Not long thereafter a second fracture is unavoidably introduced in the form of the discovery that the entry into culture involves the encounter with the rules and demands that are intrinsic to that domain. This encounter involves the necessity of curtailing or inhibiting one's own **desire**. Lacan calls this phase *nom du pere*, **the Name-of-the-Father.** It is neither synonymous with the now opprobrious term "patriarchy," nor does it necessitate that the father or some important male be its agent. Whoever represents the law-giving, rule-subscribing role of culture and its introduction into the life of the child is the embodiment of the Name-of-the-Father. The necessity of henceforth containing oneself renders highly problematic what Lacan calls ***jouissance.*** the French word for sexual pleasure, usually translated as enjoyment or left untranslated. When the subject is forced to relinquish the *jouissance* of one's own satisfaction with the mother so that one henceforth lives in a state of wanting or of lack, a residue of that paradise now lost remains in the pull of the image or object of enthrallment which Lacan calls the **object a**. It is the lost object, that which is desired but never attained. Every object of desire will never be more than a substitute for the object a.

The crisis brought about by the advent of the law of culture, of the curtailing of desire, represents the irrevocable split which gives rise to the emergence of the person as conscious **subject,** a term Lacan prefers to person, self, personality or individual. Because it arises in the wake of entry into the experience of culture as

limiting desire, the Name-of-the-Father is associated with castration, not as with Freud, of the male member, but of the hope, henceforth, of being able ever to fully satisfy desire. As such, castration signifies the sense of a lack, or of division, that will forever haunt the subject and characterize consciousness even though, paradoxically, within subjectivity wholeness and an absence of division is assumed. Yet it is the sense a lack or of a yearning that henceforth drives the subject's actions and feelings. The subject continues to desire, in other words, but finds he can never have the full measure of what he desires, or if he arrives at it it lacks something or seems like it was not what he wanted in the first place.

This curtailing of the subject's own desire represents the entrance into the **Symbolic** order, the social world and its inescapable body of rules of language, of law and order, and the restrictions that culture demands of us as its price for the comforts and securities it offers. It is internalized as the big **Other**, something like the super ego, but more. Henceforth we constantly subject ourselves to the judgment of the Other (Bowie, 1987). It is the big Other which finally renders the feeling of being always lacking, of desiring whatever will fill that hole and make us whole. The subject comes to desire what the big Other desires. Since, however, it is no longer the subject's own desire that is sought, but the Other's, satisfaction can never quite be had. The desire for the desire of the Other has replaced desire for oneness with the mother, hence ever thereafter the subject never really knows what she desires, hence "man is the animal who does not know what he wants." When we get what we want we are either disappointed, or desire something or someone else. The subject, however, still strives to realize his desire, vicariously and through fantasy. This is the blossoming of the **Imaginary** order, that of desiring, enjoying, imagining, but most of all of emulating, admiring, of more generally desiring what others desire. Through the Imaginary the subject can make the desire of the Other, or of the other, the means by which one recovers the pleasure of one's own desire . Because desire involves a lack, the aroused state of desire is most often associated

with the **phallus** or the **phallic signifier**. As with castration, the phallus is by no means symbolic of the male organ, though in a highly male-dominant society the latter may be a phallic symbol. The phallus, in Lacanian, represents an object of desire as a culturally-validated mark of prestige, even as it reminds of the lack in the subject that seems only able to be filled by the phallus.

There is a third order known as the **Real**. It does not, as might initially be thought, have anything to do with objective reality. It encompasses the domain of the irreducible, those features of mortality, of embodiment, of materiality, all that is recalcitrant and which keeps coming back to remind us that it never goes away, including especially those desires for the forbidden that will never leave us. It is the seat of anxiety and whenever anxiety is present it may be assumed that the Real is intruding upon us. Severely traumatic experiences, notably what is today termed the post-traumatic stress disorder may represent a terror of the Real in its resistance to all the most desperate symbolic resources of the subject to make sense of or to integrate the terrible experience into anything previously meaningful.

The struggle between the three orders may invite pain and frustration, but they also give rise to great creative achievements. Indeed the artistic innovator in particular may be a subject whose determination to express her Imaginary desire is rewarded within the Symbolic order. Moreover those who have a major impact on the social order itself, who influence how we think and feel about, and even see or hear the world, people such as Picasso, Joyce, Kafka or, within popular culture, Elvis Presley, Lennon and McCartney (Sullivan, 1995), are people who refused to fully surrender some aspect of their Imaginary desire and had sufficient talent in its expression that they were able to alter the Symbolic itself. Yet even here it is the desire for something missing, a phallic signifier that might plug a hole in the Symbolic itself which had opened up at a particular time due to changes in historical circumstance. Such figures are not likely to come from the ranks of the included,

who tend to be those who have more or less willingly exchanged their own desire in return for the desire of the big Other. Instead they are likely to come from amongst those of the excluded who will not be denied, but discover or are shown a means of expression that creates rather than destroys. It is, therefore, not simply the excluded who introduce changes into the social order, but those of them who refuse to surrender their own *jouissance* to the demands of the big Other.

While I think it is sufficient for the purposes of this presentation to restrict myself to the ideas of Derrida, Lacan and Foucault to represent the poststructuralist position and to by-pass the otherwise striking and influential work of such figures as Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari and Roland Barthes, I cannot so easily pass by the literary critic and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva (1982; 1997). Some of the directions that her recent work has been taking contain themes that further clarify and even ground the better known work of the "Big Three.". Kristeva has significant points of contact with each of Derrida, Lacan and Foucault. With Derrida she regards language as at least partially liberating to the extent that it is regarded as an interplay between three movements, the semiotic, the symbolic and the thetic. With Foucault she regards the social order and its demands as oppressive.

The **semiotic** is similar to Lacan's mirror stage but more focused on the body as the original source of pleasure and gives rise to laughter, music and rhythm as playful means of self-expression. The **symbolic** is similar to Lacan's Name-of-the-Father, his designation for the symbolic order, but it refers more to the demand that we conform to the prescriptions, rules and codes of human social life and that we view the world in terms of binary identities of male/female, hetero/homosexual not to speak of good/bad, right/wrong, truth/falsehood and such. For Kristeva these strictures are imposed more aggressively than for Lacan. They are a violent force reminiscent of Nietzsche's will-to-power or Foucault's power/knowledge, a force that pervades and imposes though not from any particular center. "The symbolic is thereby dissociated from all pleasure, made to oppose it, and is set up as the paternal

place, the place of the superego" (Kristeva, 1997, p. 76). To address the violent, repressive force of this function Kristeva posits the ***thetic*** phase which she calls "a threshold between . . . the pleasurable semiotic and the demanding symbolic." The thetic phase makes possible a poetic language which does not have to define and categorize the world, but can name it in a polysemic, metaphorical or rhythmic way which can be transgressive, but decidedly not violent. Rather it is"erotic, aesthetic and close to the body. For Kristeva poetic language can be transgressive because it is neither outside of the reigning social/symbolic order nor inside it, but at its limit" (MacDonald, 1995, p. 94). Thetic language, in a word, can be the means by which the embodied pleasures of the otherwise repressed semiotic stage make their way into and subvert the violence and control of the symbolic order.

If her discussion of poetic language perhaps brings Derrida's treatment of the freeplay of signifiers not only to mind, but to fruition, her arresting concept of **abjection** seems to complete Lacan's confused subject, ($), while also going further with his concept of the Real as that unsymbolized remainder which will not be denied. It is also reminiscent of Lacan's emphasis on that which we lack. Like the thetic, the abject is a state found on the border, also in some sense. between the natural and the social. The abject is that which is excluded from the demanding symbolic realm because it pertains to the pleasurable body of the mother. Abjection, then, refers to all those experiences that do not belong, should not even be spoken and therefore which do not fit within the cultural world of the acceptable. On the other hand it is not, says Oliver, "what is grotesque or unclean, rather it is what calls into question borders and threatens identity. The abject is on the borderline, and as such it is both fascinating and terrifying. Ultimately, the abject is identified with the maternal body since the uncertain boundary between maternal body and infant provides the primary experience of both horror and fascination" (Kristeva, 1997, p. 225). Thus, neither subject nor object the abject belongs to that domain of the feminine which is ejected from the cultural symbolic order in the interests of

maintaining order, stability and discrete boundaries.

Yet, as in most things psychological, that which is ejected does not meekly go away but returns often in the form of defilements associated with the body in such a way as to evoke the desire/revulsion of the longed for maternal body, the everlasting cultural remainder. It is that which, in its offensiveness to all "mono-theistic and mono-logical" systems, is invariably tamed and domesticated as the Blessed Virgin Mary, the ultimate mother, or scapegoated as the whore or the *femme fatale,* who leads men to their destruction. The abject, however, is not necessarily female, but any unwanted and mostly despised cultural remainder. It is the scapegoat, whether as" Jew," "nigger," "faggot" or woman. Yet we all have a wound which never heals but forever seeks in the other the possibility of healing. Kristeva looks to the holy texts of Judaism and Christianity, the Bible, as the source of a tradition in which abjection is embraced rather than ejected. This "internalization of abjection" becomes the speaking subject for the Christian who identifies with the broken, abject Body of Christ both in the Eucharist and in daily living. Thus instead of regarding our wounds as Lacan's lack, they become that which links us to all suffering humanity, indeed to the suffering of all that lives and makes of our own lives a state of "being for others," reaching out in what Kristeva describes as the *jouissance* of a "holy madness" that speaks, sings and dances its outreach toward all those others, never forgetting the other within oneself, who have been abjected.

The Enlightenment and Beyond

The work of Derrida, Foucault and Lacan as well as of Kristeva, whatever their differences from one another, is marked by a critical departure from the assumptions formed by the eighteenth century Enlightenment. Its faith in reason and the prospects for the release of humanity from the shackles of unreason and oppressive authority in all its forms promised to take a fully liberated humanity

into the bright sunshine of an ever-improving future. Though not himself one of the champions of the liberating powers of reason, Rousseau's opening words to the *Social Contract* seem to epitomize the Enlightenment view of the world and of human possibilities: "Man is born free and everywhere he is in chains" (1762/1962, p. 169). Humanity's problems, in short, were seen to exist, not in human nature, but as the consequence of being oppressed, held captive by tyrants and frightened and taught superstition by priests and other mystagogues and obscurantists. Release from these by the clear light that our capacity to reason made possible we would then see that no form of tyranny, whether political, religious or cultural has legitimacy over us. Our finally unfettered reason and the right to liberty that it allowed us to realize demanded that we be free from all of these, and once free there would be no limit on the possibilities toward which we could aspire and achieve. "The men of the Enlightenment united on a vastly ambitious program, a program of secularism, humanity, cosmopolitanism, and freedom, above all freedom in its many forms--freedom from arbitrary power, freedom of speech, freedom of trade, freedom to realize one's talents, freedom of aesthetic response, freedom, in a word, of moral man to make his own way in the world" (Jay, 1966, p. 3).

To this optimistic and inspiring program the poststructuralists took issue. Foucault's challenge to the assumptions of the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment was concerted and it was specific. For Derrida and Lacan the challenge was more implied and far less categorical. Nonetheless the work of all three insists that the wholeness that the Enlightenment saw in human nature, and the capacity for our liberated reason to lead us to even greater completeness, is an illusion of the assumption that words are equal to the reality they describe, that the very claim to liberate is simply a discourse that limits the terms of its claim to docile behavior and that the symbolic order which grows out of language inescapably leaves us at odds with our own nature.

These are conclusions that seem as far away as possible from the world of

Michael White and his followers. White's recent identification of himself as a poststructuralist (1998) notwithstanding, his remains the world of the Enlightenment with its exuberant confidence in the human capacity to overthrow tyrannies of both the body and the mind. There is no discernible trace in White's work of the poststructuralist sense of a division within human life that language, and with it culture, introduces whether in terms of Foucault's sense of the carceral nature of discourse, Derrida's sense of the propensity toward binary divisions in quest of a transcendental signified, or Lacan's replacement of the desire of the big Other for one's own. Indeed, call upon Foucault as he might, White seems to do so primarily to make of the technologies of power/knowledge a postmodern version of the forces of tyranny which the Enlightenment *philosophes* thought were about to be overthrown. In this sense, White's use of externalization seems but one of the new technologies of the self, still in the service of *liberte, egalite, fraternite.* by which an oppressive story is overthrown with the same fervor with which the *ancien regime* was eliminated by the modernity's first great violent revolution.

There is in this none of the ambiguity or of the comic/tragic sense so congenial to the European thought of the posstructuralists. As during the Enlightenment and its reign of close to two-hundred years the only fault is out there, in an oppressive society whose mystifying means of controlling people are to be thrown off. The only difference is that traditional society kept people in bondage through superstition and fear. Modern society keeps people in bondage through the fruits of the very science that liberated them from ignorance: technologies of power/knowledge that kept people under observation until they began observing themselves. It is these new oppressors that White would overthrow, but with little of Foucault's sense that there is never any escape from the ubiquity of power in human affairs and of the power of discourse to set the terms even of any resistance against it. For Foucault there is only resistance there is never liberation. which is simply a signifier limited by the very discourse that it challenges.

All this would be of very little consequence were it not that White has been so associated with the name of Michel Foucault, both by himself (1989, 1991) and others (Madigan, 1992), and has identified himself as a poststructuralist, primarily on the grounds that the latter stands for the de-centering of the subject which translates into the therapeutic world merely as the de-centering of the therapist and all other experts and authority figures. The theme of de-centering is highly significant within poststructuralist and postmodern discourse, but it refers more to the fracture that runs through human life which actually de-centers the subject from its own experience, than puts the subject at the center. Indeed, by de-centering the therapist in order to place the client at the center as the expert on her own life the poststructuralist and particularly Foucauldian and Lacanian sense of the concept is almost reversed. The de-centering of the subject refers, among other things, to its inability to encompass itself, to be fully present to itself, in short its sheer inability to be what the Enlightenment claimed for human possibility. Instead there is a rejected or abject aspect to the subject inescapably born of that rent between desire and the curtailing demands of the symbolic order that leaves us feeling that we are forever lacking. For White that feeling of a lack is remediable. Indeed, as Schwartz (1999) points out White and the particular approach to narrative therapy identified with him "are so afraid parents will feel blamed they sometimes refuse to consider the possibility that there are things family members are doing that may be contributing to the problems," (pp. 265-66). He might have added that these invariably stem from feelings of deep inadequacy that are often glossed over by a combination of therapeutic reassurances and externalizations of blame onto such very real "structures of inequality of our culture, including those pertaining to gender, race, ethnicity, class, economics, age, and so on" (White quoted in Schwartz, 1999, p. 264). There is no gainsaying the value of addressing these where applicable. There is also much to be gained by allowing people the legitimacy of their feelings of abjection

and to regard these not just as unwanted impositions from the dominant story imposed by an unjust society, rather as the very means by which they may be able to reach out in compassion to their own child's abjection in the form of the symptom he bears, the better to include rather than exclude him by implication. By this means they may learn to tell the story of their own experiences of abjection rather than having them externalized back into silence so that the otherwise excluded child may fit once again into the societal norm.

White is much more akin to New World social constructionism than he is, by far, to Old World poststructuralism. Social constructionism proposes simply that the world as a locus of meaning is constituted through and by language. It "assumes that human action takes place in a reality of understanding that is created through social construction and dialogue and that we live and understand our lives through socially constructed narrative realities, that is, that we give meaning and organization to our experiences and to our self-identity in the course of these transactions" (Anderson, 1993, p. 324). Where, I believe, social constructionism and poststructuralism part company is that the former allows of no area of human experience that is beyond the capacity of the symbolic order to "language," in the service of its hegemonic, purposes. In its post-Enlightenment-style confidence it has no room for anything like Lacan's realm of the Real or of Kristeva's abjection. These refer to areas of experience for which language can be employed to describe them to be sure, but it is invariably what Kristeva means by poetic language, language used in the domains of art, literature, theater, film and music.

The failure to recognize the limits of discourse and the necessity of poetic language for putting our abjection into words may, in fact, partially explain the suspicion sometimes voiced by the more zealous of the social constructionists against the literary and artistic classics of the Western world where those experiences of the uncanny, of the unspeakable, of dread and of horror are best represented. Because of their continuing faith in the power of discourse, and of

reason, social constructionists boldly go forth to "language" such traumatic encounters with horror as the obscenities of sexual abuse and the strange attractions that can be created by sexual passion in the often scolding and judgmental language now referred to disparagingly as "politically correct." For the poststructuralists, by contrast, the human condition is inescapably a fractured one *because* we live in language. The argument of social constructionism would suggest that, if an oppressive world has been brought forth by the power practices of patriarchy, a liberated world could as readily be constructed by the simple practice of cleaning up our language.

The optimism and healthy-mindedness White and his narrative approach share with their social constructionist compatriots might seem markedly preferable to pessimism of the poststructuralists. I would argue the opposite. White approaches the inclusion of the excluded in a profoundly anti-psychological way. The externalization of the problem as the very heart of the therapeutic method, is part of a concerted attempt to reassure all concerned that the behavior the family is concerned about has nothing to do with them as persons. They do not have to look within, to get to know themselves or each other. They have only to band together against the problem, which is seen to exist outside themselves, and expel it from the family. In this regard White is true to Foucault's own anti-psychological animus.

The value of a deconstructionist approach to therapy, by contrast, is that, regardless of its literary merits, it rings true therapeutically. A behavior or an emotion that is ignored, denied or otherwise marginalized while more conventionalized behaviors are privileged eventually comes, in Bennington's evocative passage to haunt and eventually dominate the family's life: "What one tries to keep outside inhabits the inside and there would be no inside without that fact. . . . We could say, for example, that the term excluded by the binary divide returns in some sense . . .to sign the act of its own exclusion" (Bennington &

Derrida, 1992, p. 217). Who has not seen the once-happy family who now describe themselves in terms of the effect of a behavior or an emotion once overlooked or denied but which has come virtually to define their life together? We can only wonder how innocently and easily overlooked the sense of exclusion that must have been a driving force behind the school shootings at Littleton and Taber began.

Derrida's deconstruction is invaluable in identifying the deleterious effect of the propensity for viewing the world in terms of binary divisions. Foucault is helpful in shedding light on the peculiar twist one such binary split has taken in the history of the modern West, that between reason and unreason within a discourse of normalization such that unruliness is too-often silenced. It is Lacan, however, who I think sheds most light on the dynamic forces at work within the human psyche itself which give rise to the propensity for splitting experience then privileging one side at the expense of the other in the first place. His insistence that a sense of a lack is intrinsic to the human condition, resulting in the longing of a desire to fill that lack, helps account for the alacrity which possession of the phallic signifier of prestige and status is sought while the unhappy sense of being lacking, of abjection, is invariably disowned. If it can be located in another person it represents an assurance of sorts that oneself has indeed escaped the horror.

The deconstruction of the stories people live by is best accomplished, not by "the objectification of the problem for which person seek therapy" (White, 1991, p. 29), but by assuming that the problem represents an unvoiced story. It is likely, furthermore, to be the symptomatic enactment of the story of family members who have experienced themselves as excluded, unheard or otherwise marginalized in their family and/or social world. Lest it be protested that this would be to induce guilt in other family members, implying that they or at least the parents had failed by excluding, silencing or not hearing the symptom-bearer, I would suggest that this is precisely where the value of the poststructuralist approach is not only helpful, but opens the door to a different way of doing therapy than that bequested to us by the

Enlightenment.

Under the influence of the ego psychologies within psychoanalysis, as represented for instance by Erik Erikson, the humanistic approaches identified with Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow and their more existential comrade, Rollo May set in motion a confident and optimistic approach that was characteristically American. It was founded upon an equally optimistic view of human nature and its potentialities. As such it was firmly within the Enlightenment tradition of confidence in the choices of a liberated human nature. This is not to suggest a return to a darker view of the human condition as of a compassionate view of the confusions and frustrations inherent in the struggle to be human. The poststructuralists have reminded us of the limits of language to represent the world it purports to describe and the human propensity to describe ideals which we then find we cannot realize. The Enlightenment tried to turn the methods and assumptions behind the spectacular accomplishments of science onto the human subject. Things become problematic, however, in almost anything to do with the world of the subjective or the intersubjective.

Language is a prisoner of how we seek to present ourselves to others. We give priority to what we tell ourselves and others about who we are in the hope of confirming our self-image in their eyes and ours. We then pay less attention to ways we express ourselves at variance with our carefully constructed self-image. We often become upset when others tell us they see us differently than we describe ourselves. "He's trying to hurt me!" "She just doesn't like me!" "They don't really know me!" Our own words about ourselves, moreover, can never encompass any but a small portion of ourselves, and even there our own words are simply interpretations. After all, in anything subjective or intersubjective, we do not so much know as we make up theories, stories if you like, to explain our own actions to ourselves as well as to others. Such convenient fictions inevitably exclude more than they include yet what is excluded invariably comes to haunt us. There is always that remainder that

language can never reach. We are forever being surprised by ourselves.

Kristeva, in her arresting image of abjection, best addresses, I think, all the ways we exclude. The abject is everything that is cast aside with revulsion, yet that continues to fascinate. It will not be denied or excluded. It is everything that is "opposed to I". It is similar to Lacan's *Che vuoi?* the "What do you/they want?"that is asked of every Other, every person or group, be it women, Jews, Blacks, gay and lesbian people, whose assumed desire precludes identification of that of the I with their Other. They and their desire are alien to "us." "It is not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, systems, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). Nor is it likely that those objected to as abject even possess the qualities ascribed to them. Once they are seen as among the abject the qualities associated therewith, the "immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that dissembles . . . (p. 4), are attributed to them. It is similar, if not identical, to the phenomenon of anti-Semitism, in short of the scapegoat upon whom is heaped all that the community or the family disowns within itself. For those expecting or longing for, a well-ordered community or family "the 'Jew' appears as an intruder who introduces from outside disorder, decomposition and corruption of the social edifice . . . whose elimination would enable us to restore order, stability and identity" (Zizek, 1989, p. 128).

Whether we imagine it in terms of Derridean deconstruction, of Lacan's lack leading to restless desire, or of Kristeva's abjection, the human condition itself, by virtue of the conflict between the assumptions and the limitations of language, and between our desires and their disappointments leaves a slash of uncertainty through all our efforts to deal with ourselves and each other. The powers of language flatter us into believing that we are who we want ourselves to be. The limitations of language fool us into being able to ignore, even repudiate, the ways

we fall short. What we do not want to see in ourselves, however, we conveniently have little difficulty seeing in others.

Kristeva's challenging response to this convenient visual anomaly is a call to embrace the abjection which we otherwise would deny in ourselves. Nothing would seem so at variance with what is preferred today where high self-esteem has virtually assumed the proportions of a moral imperative. We are to think well of ourselves, not only because we are apt to be happier and more productive that way, but because it is generally seen as virtually impossible to think well of others unless we first think well of ourselves. Although this assumption makes a certain kind of intuitive sense, that people who are comfortable with themselves seem to be equally comfortable with others, I am not sure it seems as obvious that people who think highly of themselves think equally highly of others. Self-esteem probably has more to do with a feeling of success in the ongoing task of persuading others that we are the fine person we have already been persuading ourselves we are than of an independent gauge that tells us how good we feel about ourselves. High self-esteem may be simply a function of effective self-image management, certainly a necessary social survival strategy, but one that is probably at least as competitive in relation to others as it is synergistic. Those who achieve dominance in relation to the other are likely to experience high self-esteem (Cf. Parry, 1999).

If, on the other hand, we were to accept our own abjections, our own failings, even with humor, we might enable us to be more open and accepting of the abjection of others than we are by protesting the contrary about ourselves. Indeed, I would propose that the goal of high self-esteem be replaced by one of making friends with ourselves. Maintaining high self esteem is like being in a relationship in which one has always to be at one's best. Friendships, by contrast, are not like that. In friendship one feels accepted amidst one's highs and lows. Likewise, making friends with oneself means being able to accept one's abjection and one's achievements with equanimity, humor and, above all, loyalty.

The Whitean method of externalization, by contrast, follows precisely from the assumption that the worst thing that can happen in therapy or anywhere else for that matter is that anybody feel badly about themselves. Thus externalization means never having to feel bad. No person, persons or family is the problem. Like Foucault's definition of power, the problem is everywhere and nowhere. It is simply to be cast into the void, from whence it presumably came. Where clearly applicable the source of the problem might be shown to be society. Family life is not to be looked at too closely nor are problematic interactions. Still less are issues personal to any family member. All tendencies toward the internalization or psychologization of symptoms are to be replaced by the anti-psychological practice of externalization.

Much of the narrative orientation current today, moreover, is carried out in the name of ridding the field of all vestiges of what is termed pathologizing discourse. I would like, however, to offer a word on behalf of pathologizing. In my opinion it is medicalization that this debate is actually about: the use of psychiatric labels which exclude from the normal for explaining people's behavior and resulting distress. In its place narrative therapists encourage conversations of a non-technical nature between themselves and their patients which are extolled as being non-pathologizing. Pathologizing, however, simply means the *logos* of pathos, conversation about one's suffering. That is our business and our challenge is to facilitate an atmosphere in which people cán take their social masks off for a specified time to acknowledge and talk about their suffering, their abjection. The narrative I personally want to encourage people to share with me as their therapist, then, is the story of their suffering. Even more importantly, I want them to reach a position of sufficient trust in the other members of their family that each person in the family is then willing to share the story of their own suffering, their own abjection, with each other. After all, the best stories are probably about people's suffering and the ways they have managed to transcend themselves thereby.

The greatest literary expression of this is surely Proust's *In Search of Lost*

Time (1981)which might even serve as a guide to a therapy of abjection, for Proust acknowledges "in detail all the silly, insignificant, pointless, accidental, sometimes horrible things he did . . . the disjointed and often base motives out of which he acted" (Nehamas, 1985, p. 168) as necessary preparations for his having become the author of his own story. Proust's self-understanding which enabled him to be honest enough with himself to face his own abjection, had a point of departure. At a time of his own abjection he visited his mother. He happened to agreed to tea. As he sunk his teeth into some pastry his memory returned him to Combray, his childhood Eden. Likewise for anyone to be willing to face and then tell the story of their own abjection they very likely need to do so from a point of departure which is apt to take place during a time of desperation in their life.

The biggest obstacle to such story-telling is that other insidious narrative, the self-justifying story, the story which tends to be told anytime one's social status is under question. It is the story persons tell when they feel that they are otherwise apt to be criticized or are in a defensive position. It is the story that makes oneself look good invariably at the expense of someone else. This is the story the therapist want to help the family get beyond, by facilitating an atmosphere of acceptance, trust and compassion such that each family member is willing to relinquish the quest for the phallic signifier, their quest for the security of the privileged position where they are safe from attack. The pursuit of high self-esteem actually has the unintended effect of encouraging people to draw upon their repertoire of self-justifying stories by which the self-image, the *persona*, that actually means never having to be honest with themselves. As such it may be seen as a modern version of self-righteousness. Indeed, as long as our own abjection is regarded as something to be avoided, a shameful thing, one's experience of it is apt to give rise to deep resentment which, moreover, is at risk for providing the justification for the gratuitous nasty deed as in, "I've been shafted. Now it's my turn!" Who is to know how many acts of

incommensurable wickedness, in fact, have been set in motion by a reaction to one's resented abjection? The insistence of many narrative therapists that family members should never hear anything said that could be construed as implying personal blame or even responsibility serves to deny them the opportunity to shed the burden of the mask and share the story of their suffering, their confusions and disappointments with one another.

This is what enables us to care for one another, the realization that behind the other's mask of assurance, of swagger and attitude, or perhaps even of scorn or anger, stands another human being like themselves who is hurt, confused and feels misunderstood. No matter how adept we are with words, the poststructuralists remind us is that language has its limitations, we can never quite say exactly what we mean or mean precisely what we say. In addition our very desires confuse us. Yet there is hope for us amidst this confusion. While we do not seem to be very good at knowing our own desire, we are highly adept at sensing the desire of the other, for our desire is to be the desire of the other. When we recognize that the other also acts, behind the pretense of the image, from the same abjection from which we ourselves act we may truly decide to make the desire of the other our own desire for as, Hegel assures us, the desire of the other is always for our recognition.

A Therapeutics of Pathos

I saw Margaret, a single parent of forty-five with two children, Dorothy who was eighteen and Holly who was two weeks from her thirteenth birthday in consultation at the request of their therapist who had been attempting without success to free the family from Holly's rages through externalizing "Temper." Margaret and Dorothy seemed more like co-parents than mother and daughter. They were very upset with Holly whom they described as extremely lazy, refusing to help around the house and leaving food and clothes for the other two to clean up. When criticized or pressured she would fly into tantrums in which she would scream, swear obscenities and throw things, anything she could get her hands on.

Holly sat during the entire nearly two-hour consultation with an impish grin on her face while her mother and sister talked with great seriousness about her outrageous behavior. After experiencing myself more than an hour as just as stuck as the therapist had been I asked Holly what upset her the most about her mother. She said that her mother refused to do things with her. Her impish grin faded as she spoke. She gave as an example her mother never taking her to work at the small, local video store with her. Holly went on to say how much she admired and loved her mother. I focused upon Holly's impending entrance into teenhood and asked her if she would like to make a positive difference in her family as a gift to her mother. She said she would. I then shifted gears and asked her if, since she already gave the family a lot of excitement, if simply behaving herself and cooperating with chores, etc. would not make home life rather boring. Margaret intervened to say that if Holly were more friendly and helpful she could start enjoying her again, that she had been feeling she had lost her once-happy child. Holly agreed with her mother that life at home would by no means be dull if she were more helpful and showed better humor. Since this family watched a lot of movies due to Margaret's job at the video store I likened life to a movie in which we choose the part we wish to play. It could be up to Holly to choose what part she wanted to play now when she became a teenager. She took me up on it. I was informed by the therapist that Holly had become a delight in the family once again and that her mother was now taking her to the video store on quieter evenings with some frequency. Holly was loving it. The turning point was Holly's acknowledgement of her longing for her mother and her mother's for her in the admission of how much they had been missing the pleasure of each other's company.

I had been seeing the family of fourteen year old Mike, the youngest child in a single parent family led by the mother, Andrea, who has four children, two older girls, one twenty-two and the other nineteen, and a brother Charles, sixteen off and

on for several years, mostly to deal with Charles' reluctance to attend school. He no sooner resumed regular school attendance than Mike picked up as if where his brother had left off. This was too much for the others. Where Mike as the youngest had been the family favorite he quickly became the target of their anger and frustration. He had always been his father's favorite as well. His favored place in the family had already changed dramatically when his mother's new male friend moved in. His mother had little time for Mike who had to face the added indignity of abandoning his own room to move in with his brother who had always resented his favored status.

I had held two meeting with the family in which all members save Andrea's partner who had "written off" Mike attended. All excepting his mother criticized Mike, as if trying to shame him into returning to school. He became sullen and stubborn. For the next session I invited only Mike and his mother. I focused only on his feelings. He admitted to being confused, hurt, angry, bitter, emotionally abandoned. In marked contrast to the previous two sessions he began to speak up. He spoke of how betrayed he felt when forced to move in with his brother to make room for his mother's boy friend, how alone and hurt he felt when the entire family turned on him. As he told his story and listened to our encouragement in the session it was as if a load had been lifted. He spoke with increasing ease and responded very emotionally, his voice cracking, when his mother and I complimented him. Once encouraged to tell his story of his hurt and loss his manner and his behavior changed and he has become included again as the friendly, carefree boy that everyone used to enjoy so much in the family.

When we acknowledge our abjection and tell its story we no longer have to pretend or deny. Moreover, as Yeats tells us, "Nothing can be sole or whole/That has not been rent" (1928/1962, p. 161). It may be, then, that the fracture that signals our abjection is not something regrettable to be cured of, but a necessary step toward the only completeness given to us: to recognize and touch the suffering of the other.

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